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THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WARS.

STEPHEN H. ALLEN.

IN PLACING the responsibility for the horrors of the present conflict in Europe it is usual to speak of the nations involved and to regard Germany, France, Austria, Russia and England, each as a distinct entity, morally responsible for all that is done by its rulers, armies and navies. At the same time we know very well that none of the common soldiers or sailors who suffer death, wound or disease as a result of it have had any direct connection with its inauguration, and none of them could have prevented it. The organization of their governments places the power to levy war in the hands of those least likely to suffer from it, without leaving a veto or even a referendum vote to those who are called on to make supreme sacrifices in it. These facts, however, do not necessarily exempt the sufferers from all moral responsibility for the conditions that finally induce war. The men by whose determination war is instituted base their action on what are assumed to be national interests or obligations; never on the general welfare of all humanity. They never weigh the evils that will result to all human beings it affects against the good it will bring them. If they were to do so, fairly and honestly, there would be no war. They look mainly to their own people for approbation, to be based on the injury and wrongs inflicted on the enemy. They ordinarily gain applause at home if a large majority of those killed in the strife are their adversaries, and neutrals are prone to pass favorable judgment on their military achievements without much comment on the wickedness of their motives or conduct. The fact that the people of their own country have suffered in less degree is deemed good ground for rejoicing rather than mourning.

As an ideal character, the instigator of war is a human monster who takes delight in wickedness and savagery; but, when we look for the man who is to be charged with this acme of moral depravity, we fail to find him. The evil spirit works in so many ways and through so many instruments that each man puts forth a justification of his own motives and conduct that satisfies his own countrymen and even neutrals and enemies.

The present war in Europe is not only the greatest conflict in historic times but in some of its aspects is distinctly more savage than any other of modern times. New means of destruction are used to perpetrate new and heretofore discountenanced barbarities. Submarines, air crafts, concealed mines and long-range guns are used to slaughter civilians, women and children, as well as armed men. To guard the secrecy of military operations, newspaper correspondents are excluded and violations of the low moral code of war are not made public as in former wars, nor are the kindly deeds of soldiers publicly commended. Lack of glorification of the leaders in the conflict affords but slight compensation for lack of opportunity for public criticism of the savagery of the struggle. Savage expediency demands concealment of its work and overrides the rights of civilians and neutrals who come in its way. The food provided for the occupants of peaceful homes, old, young, men, women and children, is ruthlessly seized or destroyed, often with the home itself, on the plea of necessity. In fact there is and in the nature of things can be no necessity for such horrible crimes. The real motive is savage expediency.

But who are the savages and how do they make the kind-hearted, peace-loving people do the horrible crimes which in the aggregate are called war? Why is it that the world goes on from century to century with frequent recurrences of similar manifestations of savagery and that this supposedly enlightened age witnesses the worst one of modern times? The motives of every great war will be found to include all those which actuate the murderer, the robber, the perpetrator of arson and of all the inferior crimes that

are incident to war. What men are actuated by such motives?

In a strictly autocratic military government, the responsibility appears to be located in the autocrat and his advisers. The men holding these relations to the people under them are parts of an established system and have all been taught the code of war from infancy. International law accepts it as a method of determining controversies between nations. The preservation of internal order is supposed to depend on the military organization, which is used without hesitation when occasion seems to require it. The subjects come in contact with neighboring people more or less of whom are regarded as hereditary enemies. Whenever they suffer wrongs or affronts from foreigners, they naturally look to their rulers for protection. The policy of such rulers is generally to maintain sharp lines of division between their own subjects and those of their neighbors. The facts that neighboring people are really interested in the prosperity of each other and dependent in some degree on friendly intercourse for their own highest good and that each suffers from its own military incubus are not discerned except by the few. Even in the most democratic nations, patriotism is a virtue greatly extolled and in all countries the masses are taught that it demands unlimited sacrifices for the preservation and aggrandizement of the **nation** in time of war.

The chain of influences by which military rulers secure obedience to their commands and often enthusiastic support in aggressive wars is long and complicated. Some of its links are large and easily discerned but many necessary minor ones are not obvious. Education of the young to adore physical power and the false glories of war regardless of the fundamental ethics of human relations is the broad foundation of every military despotism. History is written to magnify the deeds of warriors, to give false color to their moral qualities, and to impress on the multitude the belief that wars are necessarily incident to the relations of nations. The lesson is taught in essence if not in words

that the common brotherhood of man is limited by national boundaries, and that whatever of peace, security and prosperity is enjoyed by the people is dependent on the ruler and the army and navy at his command. Unquestioning submission to authority is extolled as the highest proof of patriotism. Every resistance of arbitrary power is termed treason, the most odious of crimes, and punishable with death. As a further preparation of the foundation for military despotism, the memory of past wrongs from neighboring people is constantly refreshed and old distrusts and hatreds are kept alive by recounting every current act and expression that can be given an unfriendly significance. On a base so prepared the military structure is reared, propped, and buttressed by every influence that can be brought to its support. The single head, by whatever name called, is a conspicuous, dazzling, but not necessarily vital part. The Prætorian Guard of the Romans made and unmade rulers of the then known world. Imbeciles with a kingly or imperial title have in numerous instances in France, Russia, Turkey, China and other countries furnished the name for powers exercised by others, while themselves prisoners in the hands of their masters. Every military government has its military order, though not designated as a caste as in India. This order has its coterie of leading spirits surrounding or constituting the real head of the nation. Each of its members is dependent on the system for rank, power, influence and wealth. Beneath these are officers of every grade from commanders of armies to corporals, each distinguished from the multitude by his rank and attached to the system which gives him his distinction. Each looks to the great military machine for promotion and gratification of all his ambitions. Military schools send forth their graduates full of enthusiasm for the science of destruction and looking forward to the next great conflict for the opportunity to achieve distinction. Even the common soldiers share in the pride and insolence of a military caste. The civilian must stand aside for the soldier.

Interest in life centers in its activities. An army is only quickened into the life for which it is designed by the activities of war. Action and danger give zest to life, and, notwithstanding the knowledge that battles will take victims from their ranks, the army and navy are always foremost in clamoring for war. The larger and more perfect the organization, the stronger is the military spirit. An insult, a threat or a favorable opportunity for aggression excites the leaders, whose sentiments are quickly disseminated throughout the whole mass. In every government in which the military is placed above the civil power, the head of the army determines the question of peace or war. Among the civilians in a country dominated by the military order, the most powerful classes are those who manage the finances and furnish supplies to the army. These fatten in security on the devastation of war and are often the first and most persistent clamorers for it. The great, peaceful, toiling multitude is neither aggressive nor influential, and usually echoes the sentiments of the war-like elements. The religious organizations would naturally be expected to oppose their forces to the war spirit, but in fact they far more frequently add their sanction to it. In Russia and Turkey the head of the army is also head of the church.

With this combination of influences acting on public sentiment, it should not appear surprising that the people of each country engaged in the present great war are united in favor of its prosecution and loyally support their government. It has always been so in every well-organized military nation. My country, right or wrong, is a maxim generally accepted. But the war spirit is not necessarily dependent on these influences. Waves of passion sweep over nations that are lacking in military preparation and drive them precipitately into war. Notwithstanding all our antimilitary teachings and customs, our Civil War was more destructive than any European war after the time of Napoleon till the present conflict. Nor was there more adequate cause for it than for other wars. The institu-

tion of slavery in part of the Union afforded no adequate reason for the wholesale destruction of each other by the slaveholding and non-slaveholding whites. The moral responsibility for the conflict rested with intemperate agitators, north and south, who appealed to local sentiment for and against the institution to arouse hatred and further their personal ambitions. The little democracies of ancient Greece were quite as prone to go to war and quite as desperate fighters as their contemporaries who were ruled by tyrants. The Swiss, the most democratic in their ideas and organization of the people of Europe, were, and if forced into conflict now doubtless would still be, most valiant and successful warriors.

The peaceful teachings of the Christian religion are taken to heart only in times of peace. The nations professing Christianity have fought each other as much, killed and robbed each other as much since the time of Mohammed as Mohammedans have fought, killed, and robbed each other. Mohammed taught the propagation of the word by the sword while Christ taught his followers to love their enemies and return good for evil, yet Christians have attacked Mohammedans as frequently as Mohammedans have attacked Christians. The peaceful principles of Gautama appear to have been better adapted to the dispositions of his followers in eastern and southern Asia and taken more to heart by them than the teachings of Christ by the fierce Europeans.

In generalizing the lessons of history, we are forced to the conclusion that the effects of religious teachings and priestly ministrations are largely dependent on the character, stage of civilization and environment of the people taught, and that nominal conversion to any doctrine or belief does not necessarily change the feelings, impulses or actions of a people. It must be confessed, that the essential principles of Christianity concerning the relations of men to each other are right now wholly ignored by the most powerful nations of Europe. We still live in an age of brute force, an age in which teachers in some of the great

schools deny the authority of God's moral law, but it is an age in which not merely a few but great numbers see clearly the wickedness of war and of its advocates. This might also be said of some of those living in any age. The distinct progress that is apparent is in the widespread and persistent demand that the organized forces of governments shall be so reconstructed that wars between nations shall be prevented as each nation prevents its citizens from warring with each other.

Notwithstanding the appalling savagery which is now manifested and which has been exhibited in the recent past, much real progress toward universal peace is easily discerned. The destructive wars between savage tribes are things of the past in America, North and South, and relatively rare in Africa. Tribal wars everywhere have meant barbarism and sparse population. Europe and some of Asia passed through a long period, called in Europe the feudal age, in which wars between the organized forces of local leaders within the state were recognized as permissible and calling for no interference from the overlord. In Europe and until recently in the United States, personal wars, duels, were allowed and even compelled by public sentiment. These have become far less frequent in Europe and are altogether prohibited in the United States. Societies for the promotion of peace have multiplied rapidly throughout the world and those in neutral countries were never more active and determined than now. The Hague conferences have pointed the way toward permanent peace, though they have not yet succeeded in inducing the great nations to travel in it.

The private citizen who carries deadly weapons becomes an object of suspicion and thereby invites a conflict with his enemy. He thereby jeopardizes his own safety even more than that of his adversary. The old castles of feudal lords filled with armed retainers guaranteed the continuance of petty warfare between rival leaders. The great armies of Europe, organized for similar purposes, guarantee

the recurrence of bloody wars. These, like the robber bands of the castles, must give way to civilization.

But the history of our own country proves that unarmed and unprepared people may give way to passion and plunge into deadly strife. We are of European stock and inherit not only the blood but the ideas and impulses of remote savage ancestors as well, if not in as full measure, as do our kinsmen of Europe. The blaze of war once started affects us as it does them. Those on each side of the conflict fan the flames and add fuel to the conflagration. Substantially the whole mass of the people of each country involved assumes responsibility and justifies the killing of its adversaries. The impulses of the savage tribe dominate in the great nation. The clergy on both sides pray, not that their partisans may have their eyes opened to the moral quality of their acts, not that they may have courage to forgive their enemies, but that the Creator of all will help them to kill, rob and destroy their adversaries and play the part of a helpful Mars, Thor or Siva.

Let us humbly confess the sorrowful truth that in dealing with other nations the people of every country on earth at times deny the binding force of the moral law, deny God's law. Leaders give the command, the multitude applauds and the mad carnival of crime begins. When war is on, everybody disclaims responsibility for its continuance, and gives all his energy and thought to the fight.

No one man, no small coterie of men was responsible for the code duello or the private warfare it enjoined. No one man, no particular organization of men, was responsible for feudal warfare. It accorded with the moral standards of the times. So international warfare has had the sanction of general public sentiment throughout all time. Every one of us is responsible in some degree for the immorality of the accepted code which fixes the relations of nations. We are all conscious or unconscious builders of public sentiment.

It seems evident that the cure of wars between nations must be similar to that applied to private wars of all kinds and that it includes:

1st. The creation of a public sentiment throughout the world that will deny the right to inaugurate war and amend international law accordingly, so that universal condemnation will be visited on the wholesale murderer. This sentiment must be so crystallized and toughened that it will stand the strain of selfish interests, popular clamor and excitement.

2d. Disarmament; the stripping from all great nations of their separate military functions, just as the states of the American Union have been stripped of theirs.

3d. The provision of a peaceful substitute for war in the form of a tribunal to which all controversies between nations shall be submitted.

4th. The creation of an international force of some kind to carry out the tribunal's decrees. An adequate public sentiment rendering physical force unnecessary would doubtless result in time. No physical force is ever used to enforce a judgment of the Supreme Court of the United States on the states of the Union even though the loser denies the justice of it.

Public sentiment is the sum total of private sentiment. Every sane person in every state is responsible for the influence of his utterances in public and in private, spoken and written, for they are a part of the expression of public sentiment. To some it may seem more courageous to advocate war than peace. To some there may appear greater honor in killing a citizen of another country than in helping him, greater honor in killing many than few. To some the booty gained by war may appear more attractive than the peaceful gains of industry and commerce. To some the moral law, the law of the Creator may appear without force or sanction. Applied to private affairs, these are the views and sentiments of criminals. What is the moral quality of such views and sentiments on the subject of international relations? Every act and utterance that tends to war tends to immorality and crime. If nobody advocated war there would be no war. If everybody called war by a name including all the long list of awful

crimes it necessarily entails, few, if any, would have the hardihood to advocate it. Public sentiment is morally responsible for war. In the creation and expression of it each citizen does or should do his part. No one of us is exempt from bearing his share of this responsibility. Some may escape from service as soldiers; some may escape from the payment of taxes or bearing other public burdens; but none of us can escape moral responsibility for our contributions or want of contributions to this public sentiment. It follows, then, that the people of a nation that wages an aggressive war are responsible for the sentiment that causes and undertakes to justify it in varying degrees according to their respective positions, opportunities and capacities.

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